

AN ANALYSIS OF RECIDIVISM AMONG RESIDENTS RELEASED
FROM THE PRE-RELEASE CENTERS ADMINISTERED BY
MASSACHUSETTS HALFWAY HOUSES, INC.

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INTRODUCTION

The Massachusetts Department of Correction, in response to the prevailing disenchantment with effectiveness of traditional incarceration of offenders and the recognition of the valuable rehabilitative potential of Community resources, is moving towards a system of community correctional programs.¹

The Massachusetts system of community corrections was launched with the enactment of the 1972 Correctional Reform Act (chapter 777) which removed the legal barriers to community programming. Inmate institutional leaves (furloughs)² were allowed for up to 14 days per year and the work and educational release programs were expanded to create wider client eligibility. The most far reaching component of this Act, however, was the authorization of the establishment of small, separately operated community based facilities to which offenders could be transferred prior to their release on parole. These community facilities were either directly operated by or sub-contracted to the Department of Correction.³

One example of a contract house is the program established by Massachusetts Halfway Houses, Inc. (MHHI), a private organization contracted in 1972 to provide 30 beds which would serve approximately 120 men during a 12 month period. At the time

¹For a description and interim evaluation of these programs see, Landolfi, Joseph, Interim Report on Community Rehabilitation System - November 1972 - August 1973 Massachusetts Department of Correction, April 1974, Unpublished.

²See Farrington, Faye, The Massachusetts Furlough Program: A Comprehensive Assessment, Massachusetts Department of Correction, February, 1976; and Massachusetts Furlough Program Statistical Fact Sheet, Massachusetts Department of Correction, May, 1976.

³For a research evaluation of pre-release programs operated directly by the Department of Correction see LeClair, Daniel P., An Analysis of Recidivism Among Residents Released From Boston State and Shirley Pre-Release Centers During 1972-1973. Massachusetts Department of Correction, August, 1975.

MHHI consisted of Brooke House and Temporary Housing. In June of 1973 Coolidge House, a third MHHI facility was opened.

At its inception, MHHI accepted residents on a post-release basis only, (i.e., those offenders who had in fact been paroled). It was not until February of 1974 that MHHI accepted residents on a pre-release basis (i.e., residents within 18 months of their parole eligibility). This study is concerned with pre-release clients only.

Two studies have already been issued by the Massachusetts Department of Correction Research Unit concerning the MHHI programs. The first study included statistical data regarding the movement of population in and out of these pre-release programs, basic program data, and a statistical profile of background characteristics of program participants.⁴ The second study provided a comparison of commitment, personal background and criminal history variables between MHHI program completers and program non-completers.⁵ This study presented a profile of the basic statistical differences between program completers and program non-completers.

The present study attempts to evaluate the effectiveness of the MHHI's community based pre-release programs in achieving the goal of reducing the repeated criminal behavior of individuals who have experienced prison incarceration. This will be measured by rates of recidivism.

⁴Landolfi, Joseph, 1974 Client Profile, Massachusetts Halfway Houses, Inc., Massachusetts Department of Correction, September, 1975.

⁵Landolfi, Joseph, A Comparison Between Pre-Release Program Completers and Non-Completers and Massachusetts Halfway Houses, Inc., Massachusetts Department of Correction, October, 1975.

METHODOLOGY

Research Question:

The study will address the following research question:

Are those inmates who ended their terms of incarceration in a MHHI Pre-Release Center less likely to be reincarcerated within one year of their release than are similar types of inmates who did not participate in a Pre-Release program prior to release?

Samples:

For the purpose of this study a population consisting of residents released from MHHI facilities during the year 1974 was chosen as the sample. During the year 1974, a total of 41 residents were released from MHHI facilities to the free community on parole or discharge status. The breakdown by specific house was as follows: Brooke House, 17 individuals; Coolidge House, 19 individuals; and Temporary Housing, 5 individuals.

Outcome Measure:

In measuring the reduction of further criminal behavior, the standard used will be recidivism rates. A recidivist is defined as any subject who is returned for whatever reason to a Federal or State prison or to a County House of Correction or to a jail for 30 days or more. The follow-up period will be exactly one full year from the date of the subjects' release from the Pre-Release Center. It is important to note that a person can be returned either as a parole violator or on a new conviction for a new offense.

Base Expectancy Tables:

Because of the possible existence of a non-random selection process in the assignment of clients to pre-release programs, Expected Rates of recidivism will be constructed and applied to the MHHI pre-release sample. Then the Expected Rate of recidivism for the pre-release sample will be compared to the Actual Rate of recidivism of the pre-release sample. Tests of statistical significance will be used in this comparison to determine whether a low or high risk population was chosen in the process of the selection for program participants.

Data Collection:

Data collected for both samples consisted of commitment, social background and criminal history variables. This material was generated by the Massachusetts Department of Corrections Community Rehabilitation Systems (CRS) computerized data base. Booking and probation data was provided by the data base maintained by the Correction/Parole Information System Unit.⁶

⁶The author would like to acknowledge his appreciation for the aid that Dan LeClair provided in the writing of this report and the aid that Bob Patrician provided in the computer processing of the data.

FINDINGS

Of the 41 individuals who successfully completed pre-release programs operated by Massachusetts Halfway Houses, Inc. in the year 1974, only 4 recidivated. This results in an overall recidivism rate of 9.8%.

For Brooke House, of the 17 individuals who successfully completed the program one individual was returned to prison within one year resulting in 5.9% recidivism rate.

For Coolidge House, of the 19 individuals who successfully completed the program, 2 were returned to prison within one year resulting in a 10.5% recidivism rate.

For Temporary Housing Program, of the 5 individuals who successfully completed the program 1 individual was returned to prison within one year resulting in a 20% recidivism rate.

The recidivism figures are summarized below in Table I:

TABLE I

MHHI Recidivism Rates, Releasees in the Year 1974

	<u>Brooke House</u>	<u>Coolidge House</u>	<u>Temporary Housing</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
Number of Individuals	17	19	5	41
Number of Recidivists	1	2	1	4
RECIDIVISM RATE	5.9%	10.5%	20%	9.8%

These recidivism rates for MHHI facilities appear quite low when compared to the recidivism rates for the total walled institutions' releasee population. The most recent recidivism figures available for the releasees from the walled institutions are for the releasees in the year 1972. For that year, the combined recidivism rate for MCI's Concord, Walpole, Framingham, Norfolk and Forestry Camps was 22%. By separate institution, the recidivism rates ranged from a low of 14% to a high of 27%. These figures are presented in Table II, below.

TABLE II

DIFFERENTIAL RECIDIVISM RATE BY INSTITUTION FOR 1972 RELEASEES

<u>Institution of Release</u>	<u>Number of Releases</u>	<u>Percent of Total Releases</u>	<u>Recidivism Rate</u>
MCI-Concord	800	(52)	27%
MCI-Walpole	182	(12)	21%
MCI-Framingham	124	(8)	18%
MCI-Norfolk	318	(21)	15%
Forestry Camps	126	(8)	14%
TOTAL	1,550	(100)	22%

To place the comparison between Massachusetts Halfway House Inc's facilities with the overall releasee population from Massachusetts Correctional Institutions in perspective, a test of selection biases is necessary. That is to say that it is necessary to analyze the MHHI pre-release population in terms of selection factors to determine whether or not low risk recidivists were in fact selected for transfer into the facility. This was accomplished through the use of base expectancy tables determining the expected recidivism rates for the MHHI pre-release population. The specific Base Expectancy Table utilized was constructed on a population of individuals released from Massachusetts Department of Correction facilities during the year 1971. This table is presented below as Table III; and the specific risk categories are summarized and presented below as Table IV.

TABLE III

VALIDATED BASE EXPECTANCY TABLE

Total Sample RR = 25%	Twelve or More Prior Court Appearances RR = 35%	Age 27 or Younger at Time of Release RR = 48%	
		Age 28 or Older at Time of Release RR = 23%	
	Eleven or Fewer Prior Court Appearances RR = 17%	Age 25 or Younger at Time of Release RR = 24%	Total Num- ber of Charges 7 or More RR = 32%
			Total Number of Charges 6 or Less RR = 14%
		Age 26 or Older at Time of Release RR = 6%	

TABLE IV

BASE EXPECTANCY RISK CATEGORIES

Category Number	Description	Recidivism Rate
I	Age 27 or younger at time of release, 12 or more prior court appearances	48%
II	Age 25 or younger at time of release, 11 or fewer prior court appearances, and total number of charges 7 or more	32%
III	Age 28 or older at time of release, 12 or more prior court appearances	23%
IV	Age 25 or younger at time of release, 11 or fewer prior court appearances, and total number of charges 6 or less	14%
V	Age 26 or older at time of release, 11 or fewer court appearances	6%

The Base Expectancy Risk Categories as summarized in Table IV above, were applied to the combined MHHI pre-release population. Because of the size of the sample expected recidivism rates were not calculated for individual MHHI facilities. This procedure resulted in an expected recidivism rate of 22.3% for the MHHI population. This finding is particularly interesting in that the most recent Department of Correction recidivism figures (1972 releases) for releasees directly from correctional institutions find an overall recidivism rate of 22%.⁷ One concludes from this evidence that low recidivism risks were not in fact chosen for participation in MHHI programs.

When we compare the expected rate of recidivism with the actual rate of recidivism for MHHI programs, we see that releasees from MHHI programs had a considerably lower rate than expected. Table V below summarizes this finding. However, as large as the difference between the two rates is, the result was not statistically significant at the .05 significance level.⁸ It is apparent, however, that MHHI program participants exhibited much lower rates of recidivism than similar types of individuals who did not participate in pre-release programs and that this difference closely approaches statistical significance.

TABLE V
EXPECTED RATES OF RECIDIVISM COMPARED TO
OBSERVED RATE, MHHI POPULATION

Expected Rate	22.3%
Observed Rate	9.8%

⁷LeClair, Daniel P., An Analysis of Recidivism Among Residents Released from Massachusetts Correctional Institutions During the Year 1972 in Comparison with Releases in the Year 1966 and 1971. Massachusetts Department of Correction, March, 1976.

⁸ $\chi^2 = 3.72$, 1df, $P > .05$; $P < .06$

In conclusion, the present research evaluation of the three Massachusetts Halfway Houses Incorporated pre-release programs has found that pre-release program participants had lower actual recidivism rates than their expected rates. This difference closely approached statistical significance.